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A CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM FOR THE REHABILITATION OF THE RETURNING SOLDIERS

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The problems of reconstruction and the redistribution of millions of men and women to immediate profitable employment on the termination of the war are as colossal a problem as the mobilization of the army. And it is so recognized in other warring countries. Great Britain has created a Ministry of Reconstruction, and a number of official investigations and reports have already been made.

Any adequate program of rehabilitation must be developed by the government. It cannot be left to chance, to chaos, to private initiative. The consequences would be too terrible. Millions of men would drift to the cities. There may be a long period of unemployment. Industries will have to re-adjust themselves to peace demands. A million and a half women have taken the places of men, while upwards of twelve million men are, directly or indirectly, engaged behind the line in the production of war products. New cities have been built. Old cities have been congested with workers. These are some of the conditions which will be violently deranged on the termination of the war. An adequate program of reconstruction and demobilization includes the following:

(a) Provision should be made for the soldier, and, in a measure, the industrial worker as well until he is needed or has been found employment. He should be given a furlough. In England unemployment insurance is being advocated to carry the soldier over this period. The United States employment service is a proper agency for carrying through the work of demobilization. It is a nationwide agency. And it can by expansion develop itself into the agency for the handling of the tremendous human problem involved in the re-location of men at their homes, at their work, and on the farm.

(b) Education should play an important rôle in reconstruction. Our colleges and secondary schools should re-take to themselves the men whose education was interrupted, and adjust their educational

equipment and curricula to the needs of the soldiers. They should be industrial, mechanical, agricultural. Examinations and degrees, and hard and fast methods should be relaxed. The aim should be to absorb into the schools as large numbers as possible, and at the same time to adjust our education facilities to the industrial and social needs of the country.

(c) The federal government should provide emergency work on a large scale. Preparations for this should be undertaken immediately. A survey should be made. Engineering plans should be prepared, and an appropriation should be secured for this purpose. A big program of internal development should be formulated looking to,

1. Afforestation.
2. Reclamation projects.
3. Reclamation of swamp and cut-over timber lands.
4. The building of roads and highways.
5. The carrying forward of building projects interrupted by the

war.

These are indicative of the types of work to which great bodies of men could be immediately directed if provision were made for the same. It is in the open; it is suited to the life the men have been accustomed to; the great engines of war could be in part used for these purposes, and the industrial reconstruction work could be carried out on a semi-militaristic basis.

(d) There should be a big transportation program, and the development of a unified railway, water, and terminal system, for the purpose of making the agencies of transportation as efficient as possible. Great terminals are needed in a score of cities; our harbors and docks should be developed; thousands of miles of new railways should be built; the rivers of the country and the canals should be integrated into the rail transportation. As a result of such a program freight rates could be reduced, transportation facilities could be speeded up and the country could be organized for the handling of its domestic and foreign commerce as are the countries of Europe.

Secretary McAdoo has suggested a great hydro-electric power system, with central stations in different parts of the country. This should be identified with the railroad development projects; they should be large enough to supply cities and industries with power; there is an endless possibility in the harnessing of the white coal of

America as there was in Switzerland, and the Province of Ontario where state-owned hydro-electric projects have been carried through.

(e) All of the warring countries are emphasizing the necessity of returning the soldier to the land. And in England, Australia and Canada, a new kind of agriculture is being developed known as the farm colony. Experts have admitted that the soldier will not take up an unbroken piece of land where he is isolated from his fellows. Moreover the public domain of America is gone, and such a policy is impossible. Official commissions in England and Australia are developing plans by which the state will sell to the returning soldiers ready-made farms of from three to thirty acres, which a single man can cultivate. The farms are grouped about a village community, with educational, recreational and coöperative agencies for marketing and buying. An educational expert directs the activities of the colony. Would-be farmers are sold small farms, with a house, barn, and sufficient capital on easy terms, the state advancing nine-tenths of the capital, to be re-paid on long term installments. The experience of Australia in this field and Denmark as well, has demonstrated that men will remain on the farm under these conditions, that production is increased, and a new interest in agriculture is awakened. Such a program should be carried out in the United States. The colonies should be located as near cities and markets as possible. They should be located in New England, the Southern, Central, and Western States, and each colony should be adjusted to an especial kind of farming. Tractors and farm machinery should be owned in common as is now done in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania. In this way great economies are introduced, while the farmer through his coöperative agencies is able to protect himself from those speculative interests that have contributed largely to making agriculture unprofitable.

Such a program as this involves no permanent burden to the nation. It pays for itself. And America is in need of a big internal program in order to develop her resources and make the nation industrially efficient. A big agricultural program is demanded by the drift of population to the cities, the growth of tenancy, and the exhaustion of the soil. If such a program is not adopted, the alternative is industrial depression, the drift of large numbers of men to the cities, and widespread suffering. Only the government can take up the slack, for only the government has the resources to do so.